

***Private Land Public Wildlife Advisory Council
Preliminary Recommendations***

Beginning in January 2014, the Private Land Public Wildlife Council (PL/PW Council) worked to identify and prioritize the most important issues and problems around hunting access and hunter, landowner, outfitter, and Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) relations. From these issues that Council worked diligently to develop, by consensus, six primary goals for solutions and recommendations. The goals include:

- Maximize access to public lands while respecting and understanding private property rights.
- Understand, respect and improve communication among outfitters, landowners, hunters, and Fish, Wildlife & Parks in order to understand and respect all stakeholders.
- Increase public access to private property and outfitted lands owned by traditional and non-traditional landowners by addressing their needs and building relationships.
- Make the Block Management Program (BMP) easier to use for all parties (hunters, landowners, and FWP).
- Improve FWP credibility with landowners and hunters.
- Improve hunter compliance and recognize good behavior.

After months of hard work, in April 2014 the Council developed a package of preliminary consensus recommendations, which are described below. Four working groups have been tasked to further develop the highest priority recommendations, which include:

- A recommendation for a pilot program to increase public access to private property and outfitted lands (potentially an expansion of HB 454)
- A recommendation for a volunteer corner crossing program
- A recommendation to support and encourage the Hunter-Landowner Stewardship Project
- A recommendation access program funding, including a possible recommendation to combine the Home to Hunt and Non-Resident Montana Native licenses, based upon potential needs associated with other Council recommendations.

The working groups expect to complete their work, and move forward with consensus draft recommendations, by July 2014.

GOAL 1: MAXIMIZE ACCESS TO PUBLIC LANDS WHILE RESPECTING AND UNDERSTANDING PRIVATE PROPERTY RIGHTS.

Preliminary Recommendations to Address Goal 1:

1. Identify the need to inventory easement, rights-of-way, and fee title opportunities across Montana to determine purchase options that would open public access. Request coordinated efforts among the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), U.S. Forest Service (USFS), Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC), and Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP).
 - The information/inventory should be available to NGOs (not only state and federal agencies).
 - The Interagency Access Committee (FWP, BLM, USFS, DNRC, and potentially USFWS) has been reconstituted and will be meeting periodically. This committee could be a vehicle for this work.
 - The Council hopes these coordinated efforts may address the need to better understand appraisal information and procedures (though FWP is addressing this issue as well).
 - Following a coordinated inventory, the next step ("part 2" of this recommendation) would be to purchase access to public lands through easements, rights-of-way, or fee title acquisitions from willing landowners (i.e., the Red Hill project, where the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation purchased land from a willing landowner and sold the parcel to FWP, thereby improving access to the Lewis & Clark National Fork and Big Snowy Mountains).
 - Two other options under this recommendation would be to consider purchases of state lands that would allow access to federal lands, and also considering multiple uses (not only hunting).
2. Be sensitive to roads, as the issue of public versus private roads is a challenging legal topic.
3. Evaluate grazing opportunities that may improve access on a case-by-case, year-by-year basis.
4. Develop a volunteer corner crossing program
 - Ensure that liability is covered, the landowner isn't giving up anything permanently, and the program is administrative (this recommendation is not asking for legislation).
 - This could potentially be a unique component of the Block Management Program.
 - Marking boundaries using GPS would be key (resources must be available to mark boundaries ahead of time).
 - Cost-sharing may help implement this program.

- The Council stated that it would be wise to sit down with the Montana Farm Bureau, Montana Stockgrowers Association, and others early on to include landowner, farming, ranching, and other perspectives.
 - A working group formed to further develop this recommendation by the May 2014 PL/PW Council meeting.
5. Recognize that land trades are still a viable tool in the toolbox.
- Land trades make sense in some cases, and should not be overlooked.
6. Mark property boundaries, through GPS survey work, improve signage, and identify entrances and exists.
- Potentially form an interagency Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to accomplish this work.
 - Replicate and expand the existing program as a model to be used around the state.
 - Support the hiring/retention of staff to accomplish the work.

GOAL 2: UNDERSTAND, RESPECT AND IMPROVE COMMUNICATION AMONG OUTFITTERS, LANDOWNERS, HUNTERS, AND FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS IN ORDER TO UNDERSTAND AND RESPECT ALL STAKEHOLDERS.

Preliminary Recommendations to Address Goal 2:

1. Market, advertise, and more strategically communicate the value and availability of access options to landowners.
- **Develop a booklet** that identifies that range of options available to landowners who could provide public recreation access. The booklet should explain, with specific examples, how many of the programs can be tailored to each landowner. Include landowner liability information.
 - **Develop a website** geared towards landowners, which makes the “landowner toolbox” easy to understand. One section of the website should be used to clarify landowner liability protections under current statute.
 - **Develop a commercial/series of commercials** that markets relationships between hunters and landowners in order to “re-brand” these relationships. The vision is of a landowner and hunter standing and working together.

Part of this would be to involve members of the broader community, including stockgrowers, wool growers, and others, in the communications.

2. Support and encourage local, task-oriented resource management groups.

- The vision is that groups would be convened to address specific issues at the local level (and the convening must be citizen-driven). FWP could provide facilitation for the groups on a short-term basis. Members must come into the groups with an open mind, and have respect for all participants. Finally, the groups will be more successful if FWP would provide them with some authority to make changes.
- *Further explanation/development:* Each region has its own problems with access. Involving sportsmen and landowners together in consensus-based groups allows for understanding each other's problems and challenges. Building relationships over time is critical. All stakeholders would have a spot at the table. Local sportsmen groups would be helpful in setting things up. These groups need to include a wider age span, and not just the older hunting demographic. Working with the regional CACs would be one way to achieve this.

GOAL 3: INCREASE PUBLIC ACCESS TO PRIVATE PROPERTY AND OUTFITTED LANDS OWNED BY TRADITIONAL AND NON-TRADITIONAL LANDOWNERS BY ADDRESSING THEIR NEEDS AND BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS.

Preliminary Recommendations to Address Goal 3:

1. As a pilot program, broaden HB 454 Hunting Access Agreements (or develop an entirely new pilot program) in order to better achieve elk management objectives.
 - Potentially offer elk permit incentives to landowners. One suggestion was to offer one bull permit to the landowner in exchange for four public hunting permits (one would be a bull permit and three would be cow permits).
 - Another idea was to offer a "stair step" approach for permits based on the percentage the area was over-objective for elk (i.e., a property 200% over-objective would receive permits on a 1:1 ratio, while a property 100% over-objective would receive permits on a 1:2 ratio)
 - Consider flexibility outside of and within the traditional hunting seasons.
 - Consider tax benefits or tax credits for landowners.
 - A working group formed to further develop this recommendation by the May2014 PL/PW Council meeting.
 - FWP staff asked the working group to try and anticipate unintended consequences that could result from a new program.

GOAL 4: MAKE THE BLOCK MANAGEMENT PROGRAM (BMP) EASIER TO USE FOR ALL PARTIES (HUNTERS, LANDOWNERS, AND FWP).

Preliminary Recommendations to Address Goal 4:

1. The PL/PW Council supports, and would like to maintain, the cooperator flexibility currently built into the Block Management Program.

2. Move forward with web-based enhancements to the BMP website.
 - The Council reached agreement on this recommendation but is offering it as support and encouragement to the Department. Alan Charles will update the Council as progress is made towards achieving this recommendation.
3. Where feasible, enhance BMP maps with fence lines and other landmarks that are available via GPS.
4. Develop a BMP smartphone app and explore possibilities to either sell the app to users or sign a financing agreement with a private company to develop the app.
 - Any funds should be earmarked for access programs.
 - FWP is currently exploring this possibility, but will update the Council as progress is made.
5. Promote regional consistency, both through boots on the ground and the options that are available to landowners.
 - Maintain daily sign-ins and comment cards where appropriate.
 - Improve means of communication between hunting access technicians (HATs) and wardens, biologists, and coordinators.
 - FWP is reprioritizing resources to address some of this recommendation, but in order to hire additional FTE staff, additional funding will be necessary.

GOAL 5: IMPROVE FWP CREDIBILITY WITH LANDOWNERS AND HUNTERS

Preliminary Recommendations to Address Goal 5:

1. FWP should promote a consistent, accurate message.
 - The Council thought that one way to implement this recommendation would be via a strategic communications plan.
 - Issues such as the proposed bison conservation plan and land trades should be communicated with consistent, clear, and educational information.
2. FWP should attend club meetings of all “stakeholders” (hunters, landowners, and outfitters) on a consistent basis in order to build credibility.
 - In addition to field staff, regional information officers should also try to attend local stakeholder meetings.

- The groups hosting the meetings should strive to (1) invite the FWP staff and (2) protect FWP staff who attend from attack.
3. Honor BMP cooperators at sportsmen banquets. The Council's thought was that sportsmen – not always FWP – should be the ones recognizing landowners who allow access and form relationships with hunters.
- These types of meetings would be a good way to bring different groups together and send a special “thank you” to BMP cooperators.
 - Awards such as the Governor's Award and Good Neighbor Award are good examples of positive recognition.

GOAL 6: IMPROVE HUNTER COMPLIANCE AND RECOGNIZE GOOD BEHAVIOR.

Preliminary Recommendations to Address Goal 6:

1. Support and encourage the Hunter-Landowner Stewardship Project
 - The Council is in agreement that participation should be encouraged and the Project should be improved, expanded, and/or re-worked in some way.
 - A working group formed to further develop this recommendation by the May 2014 PL/PW Council meeting.
2. Publicize work done by landowners, hunters, outfitters, FWP and others to promote access and relationships.
 - FWP could actively solicit and promote this work in public forums, for example, on FWP's website. This would also be a great way to form and/or strengthen partnerships with NGOs.
 - Request that Information and Education staff help to facilitate this publicity.
 - Request that Alan Charles, in coordination with regional Information and Education staff, put together a list of awards currently offered to stakeholders by various organizations.
 - Also recognize landowners who are *not* formally enrolled as a BMP cooperator but still provide access.
3. Encourage stronger penalties and higher prioritization of Fish and Game violations in Montana's courts of limited jurisdiction.
 - Consider supporting the Montana Magistrates Association, who is planning to work with the Montana Legislature to encourage reasonable improvements to FWP enforcement laws for courts of limited jurisdiction.

- The Council suggested inviting Judge Howard or another MMA representative to visit the Council when the legislative proposal is complete so that the Council can decide whether to “sign on” in support of any legislation.
4. Develop Public Service Announcements (PSAs) that recognize and publicize good hunter/landowner relations.
- A commercial could be developed that shows a landowner and hunter working together.

IMPLEMENTATION RECOMMENDATION

1. The PL/PW Council supports, and is working towards a recommendation to increase resident sportsman license fees in order to expand funding for access programs, including the Block Management Program.
- Increased funding may be necessary to implement the Council’s finalized, consensus recommendations.
 - Increased funding for the access programs would serve to maximize FWP boots on the ground to increase communication, and therefore credibility.
 - New “boots on the ground” should be effective and efficient, and worth the investment. Boots on the ground will only be helpful if they are individuals who understand how to communicate with folks from all walks of life. Certainly, biologists, wardens, technicians, and Block Management folks should all be on the same page, and would all be considered “boots on the ground.”
 - A working group has been formed to further develop and study a license fee increase.